

*BIRTH OF WASHINGTON;*

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

WASHINGTON SOCIETY OF ALEXANDRIA,

BY

ROBERT GOODLOE HARPER,

ONE OF ITS MEMBERS,

ON THE

22D. OF FEBRUARY, A. D. 1810.

AND

PUBLISHED BY ITS ORDER.

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Alexandria :

PRINTED BY S. SNOWDEN,





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## ORATION.

TO CELEBRATE the birth of the good and great ; to recount the events of their lives, and recall the recollection of their virtues and achievements ; has been regarded in every age, as a solemn and important duty. It awakens the best feelings of the heart. It suspends for a while the operation of low and selfish passions. And tho' it cannot transform every man into a patriot and hero, it inspires all with a generous, though too often a transient ardor, to imitate the virtues and emulate the fame of those, on whom these glorious appellations have been bestowed, by the voice of their country.

Hence almost every nation has selected from its annals, fabulous or authentic, the character of some illustrious individual, as the theme of praise, and the object of imitation. Thus England has her ALFRED, Scotland her WALLACE, Sweden her VASA, France her HENRY, and Russia her PETER, whose glory is regarded as the inheritance of the nation, their character as its brightest example, and their birth as the most interesting epoch in its history.

Where the truth of history fails, resort is often had to fabulous legends or poetical invention, for decking out imaginary heroes, in colours suitable to render them fit objects of national admiration.

And too frequently has it happened, that nations, wanting examples among themselves of heroic virtue, guided by wisdom, and employed in promoting the good of mankind, have been induced, and in some sort compelled, to bestow this high mead of admiration and praise, on the fortuitous success of wild and adventurous ambition, the useless or pernicious display of romantic valour, or the more guilty achievements of dark and perfidious policy, combined with force.

But it is our happiness and glory, Americans, to be alike exempt from the temptation of admiring what ought to be pitied or detested, and from the necessity of resorting to



fiction or fable, for a proper object of national veneration. The authentic history of our country presents to our view, and many of us have ourselves seen, a man more exalted and perfect than the poets of other nations have imagined, or their fabulous traditions have portrayed. While on this day which gave him birth, we dwell with delightful recollection on his actions, and draw lessons of wisdom and virtue from his life, may it not be permitted to us to indulge an honest pride, in contrasting him with those who have heretofore been deemed most great among men, and displaying the sublime superiority which he maintains above them.

In drawing this contrast we must not dishonor his name, by bringing it into competition with the croud of kings warriors and politicians, whom in every age vanity ignorance or adulation have miscalled great. Still less must we admit into the contest those ferocious and blood thirsty destroyers, whom divine providence seems from time to time to have let loose on the earth, as the instruments of its vengeance on guilty man. However dazzling their achievements, or widely extended their devastations; however triumphant their arts or their arms; they are to be regarded as the enemies and not the friends of mankind. Their progress has been directed by perfidy violence and fraud, and their footsteps are marked with ruin and blood. Their names, when rescued by too officious history from merited oblivion, far from being held up as fit objects of admiration, ought to be gibbeted to fame, and remembered only to be abhorred. Successful crime must not usurp the palm of greatness. That high reward is reserved for great talents directed to good purposes; for valour and wisdom united with justice humanity and benevolence, for magnanimity disinterestedness and fortitude, which in prosperous or adverse fortune, maintain, like the Sun in a serene or stormy sky, the even tenor of their way, and steadily pursue their great and useful designs.

*“Who noble ends by noble means attains,  
Or failing, smiles in exile or in chains,  
Like good Aurelius let him reign, or bleed  
Like Socrates, that man is great indeed.”\**

But when we have confined the comparison with Washington, as truth and justice require, to the small number

\* POPE.



of those who possess a well founded claim to the name of great ; who have united the character of lawgiver and warrior, were adorned by some of the milder virtues, and produced by their actions a lasting or a beneficial effect on the destiny of nations ; we shall still find reason to glory in the result, and to assert the claim of our country to the honor of having produced the first of men.

In what age or country, indeed, shall we find that rare assemblage of great and opposite qualities, by which our Washington was distinguished ? Where shall we see united his calm deliberation, his promptitude and correctness of decision, and his ardour caution and perseverance in execution ? Where but in him shall we find a courage which no danger could appal, joined to a fortitude which no complication of difficulties and misfortunes could shake, a prudence never surprised or disconcerted, and a wisdom which, in situations the most untried and arduous, always discerned the right course, and continually found new resources in the midst of disaster and universal dismay ? Where else shall we perceive a discernment, which always discovered and correctly estimated the talents of others ; united with a magnanimity unceasingly endeavoring to draw them forth, to avail itself of their aid, and to acknowledge their merit and its own obligations ? In what other man shall we find strong passions, completely controlled and governed by the soundest judgment ; like a ship impelled by a strong breeze, but ever obedient to the helm ; and all the mild and amiable virtues of private and domestic life, blended with the highest qualifications of the statesman and hero ? Where but in him shall we look for a modesty which always endeavored to retire from public view, and avoided instead of courting employments honours and applause ; combined with dignity which threw a fascination greater than that of royalty around his person, and even in a private station, impressed on his equals in rank, and his superiors in age and in fortune, a respect mingled with veneration and awe ?

Where in fine shall we discover a man, whose ever ruling motive was a desire to do right, whose wisdom always discerned what was right, and whose courage and fortitude never for a moment faltered in its pursuit ?

Such was Washington ; and Providence, no less propitious to him in the part allotted him to act, than bountiful in the qualifications for filling it, placed him in scenes, which required the display of all his great endowments,



and set them all in the fairest light. There, contending on the side of justice and weakness, against power and oppression, he was enabled, with means the most inadequate, and in despite of difficulties the most appalling, to perform, without one act of inhumanity or violence, the most illustrious of human achievements, the establishment of an empire. This empire he established for his country, and not for himself. He watched over it with paternal solicitude, while it seemed to require his care; and when that appeared no longer necessary, he consummated his last great triumph over the love of power, the peculiar passion of great minds, and retired, amidst the universal regrets of his country, to exercise the virtues, and enjoy the calm and rational delights, of a private station.

To such a character we look in vain for a parallel, in the history of the world. Whether we ascend to the earliest times, and passing beyond the confines of authentic history, penetrate the regions of fable; or come down through modern ages to our days; the search is equally unavailing. Were we to regard as a true history, the beautiful romance which Xenophon has left to us, under the name of the "Cyropædia" or education of Cyrus, we should find a man brave, temperate, enterprising, active, and persevering. We should perceive in his character many traits of justice humanity and benevolence. But we should find him passing his whole life, in attacking and subduing his unoffending neighbours, instead of labouring to promote the happiness of his own countrymen; running eagerly from conquest to conquest; and spreading continually over a large portion of the earth, the miseries and horrors inseparable from invasion. Though he commanded his own passions, and governed mildly those whom he had unjustly subdued, he must be reduced to the level of a mere conqueror, less destructive and odious than others of his class, but not worthy to be brought into comparison with the sublime character of the hero and sage, who drew his sword from necessity not from choice; who fought for his country not for himself; who wept over the calamities which the injustice of others compelled him to inflict; and constantly exerted his great talents, not in extending his own power, but in promoting the happiness of others.

The delusive glare spread over the actions and character of Alexander by the eloquence of the Greeks, may mislead some into the belief, that he is worthy of being



compared with Washington. He displayd indeed great talents and extensive views, with here and there an act of seeming humanity. But when we remove the veil by which he is surrounded, we discover a fierce and bloody barbarian, whose understanding the lessons of Aristotle, and the literature of the Greeks, had enlarged and refined, without softening his savage nature, or instilling virtue or justice into his heart. Cruel from disposition and from policy, he was ever the slave of his own passions, and trampled with remorseless fury on the rights and feelings of others. He murdered his friend in a sally of brutal rage; coolly crucified many thousand Tyrians on their own shores, because they had bravely defended their country against his unprovoked invasion; and at length suitably ended his detestable life, in the midst of drunken orgies, instituted to grace the funeral of a companion of his debaucheries. The comparison of such a monster with Washington, cannot for a moment be endured.

Epaminondas, the most illustrious of the Greeks, was a patriot a statesman and a hero. More worthy than any of his countrymen to be compared with Washington, he was still inferior in the wisdom of his plans, the extent of his views, and the purity of his motives. The whole object of his policy was to raise his country to an unjust superiority, over her sister states. In the prosecution of this plan he had few difficulties to encounter. The operations were simple and limited, and the contest of short duration. Such a contest called for no display of those great qualities, which, during a long course of adverse fortune, in a most unequal struggle, were so conspicuous in Washington. And the early death of Epaminondas, in the midst of the conflict, deprived him of the opportunity of consummating, like Washington, his glory, by laying down his power, when it was no longer necessary for the safety of his country.

As Epaminondas among the Greeks, so the elder Scipio may be selected as the most perfect model of Roman greatness. Mild amiable virtuous and just, learned and polite, wise in counsel and great in action, distinguished in public affairs yet fond of retirement, successful in war yet preferring the arts of peace, he seemed born to adorn his country, and to throw lustre on the age in which he lived. Scipio too was a citizen and a patriot; and his most splendid military achievement, his victory over Hannibal, may



he said to have been performed in defending his country.

But Scipio had not, like Washington, to contend against superior force, superior discipline, and superior military and political institutions. He was not obliged to create continually the means with which he acted; to struggle continually against the indecision the divisions and the imbecility of an infant and ill-organized government, limited in its powers, and thwarted in their exercise, by the jealousies the langour and the local views, of numerous subordinate but independent sovereignties. He was not impeded continually in his operations, by the perpetual tendency of his army to dissolution, through the vices of its construction; or by the constant weariness and frequent despondency of a peaceful people, wholly unused to war, and accustomed from their infancy to ease plenty and domestic comfort. On the contrary, he was aided by the most perfect military constitution that the world has ever seen. His nation had for many ages been a nation of soldiers, cradled in war and brought up in conquest. And, to crown the whole he was supplied directed and supported by a government, equally renowned for bold profound, and steady policy, for the vigour and wisdom of its measures, and for unshaken constancy in the prosecution of its plans.

The triumph of Scipio was, therefore, the triumph of Roman institutions, Roman discipline, and the warlike character of Roman native troops, over the feeble factious and divided government and mercenary armies of Carthage: a fabric illy constructed and rotten in its foundation, which even the genius of Hannibal could not sustain. The triumph of Washington was the triumph of genius courage and constancy, over superior force and superior means from without, and difficulties of every description within.

The great talents and splendid qualities of Cæsar have bestowed a lustre on his name, by which the eyes of mankind have been too much dazzled, to perceive easily the defects of his character. He was wise brave magnanimous learned and eloquent; and the splendour of his military achievements was scarcely greater, than that of his personal accomplishments and political abilities. But ambition and the lust of power were the ruling passions of his heart. For their gratification, and for that alone, were his talents unceasingly exerted; and for that at last he



turned against the liberties of his country, those arms which she had confided to his hands. How far does he sink below Washington, whose ruling passion was the love of his country, who fought only for her safety, and who laid down his arms when she no longer needed them !

Still further below him must we place Pompey, first the confederate and afterwards the rival of Cæsar. Superior to Cæsar in nothing, inferior in many things, equally ambitious, not less skilful or less fortunate, he had the same object in view, and would have enslaved his country had he succeeded.

In the character of Germanicus we find the promise of a Washington. But he lived in inauspicious times ; the subject and adopted son of a jealous and cruel tyrant, by whose treacherous arts he was cut off in the full blossom of his virtues, before they had time to bear the fruit which their spring had promised. His great qualities, his love of his country, his obedience to the laws, his industry patience and fortitude, his humanity justice and mild disposition, and the grief of his countrymen and of the surrounding nations for his untimely fate, the expression of which not even the fear of his vindictive and all powerful murderer could suppress, give us reason to believe, that had he lived in better times and more fortunate circumstances, the world might have seen another Washington.

Titus too is an illustrious and beloved name, whose virtues inspired the highest hopes, and who died too soon for the happiness of mankind. But he had no difficult part to act, no formidable enemy to oppose, no country to save. He was called on for no display of those great talents and heroic qualities which shine in the life and actions of Washington, with whom therefore he cannot be put in competition.

The emperor Trajan may be considered in many points of view, as the most fortunate of the human race. Raised by lawful means to absolute power ; ruling in peace over the whole civilized world ; possessing an enlightened and elevated mind, a virtuous heart, and an amiable temper, with great vigor and activity of body ; he united within himself more means of promoting the happiness of his species, and of gratifying every noble passion of our nature, than have fallen to the lot of any other mortal. An unfortunate passion however for military glory, hurried him into unjust wars against his neighbors. He there consum-



ed that time which ought to have been devoted to the good of his people, inflicted misery instead of diffusing blessings, and impaired the strength of his country, in useless efforts to extend her limits.

The same capital defect appears in the character of Julian; a man still more extraordinary, though less amiable and less fortunate. If we add to this defect the observation, that they were never called on to exert, and therefore cannot be known to have possessed, the virtues of disinterestedness and patriotism, or the qualities which adversity calls forth, we must pronounce them, great and illustrious as they were, incapable of sustaining a comparison with Washington.

In Marcus Aurelius we see a wise and virtuous man seated on a throne; where he lived like a philosopher, and governed like a statesman. The best education, aiding the happiest dispositions, fitted him to be what Washington in the same situation would have been, a perfect monarch: the delight of his own times, and the admiration of the wise and good, in every succeeding age. But though we know that Washington possessed all the virtues of Aurelius, we cannot know, and have no reason to believe, that Aurelius united with them the talents and extraordinary qualities, which bore Washington triumphantly through the trying scenes, wherein he was called to act.

In a long lapse of ages which preceded, we find nothing which can enter into this competition, till Alfred of England arose, to break for a while the deep gloom of barbarism ignorance and crime, which had settled over mankind. Having delivered his country from bondage, re-established her government, and reformed her institutions, he ruled like a sage over the kingdom which he had conquered like a hero, and as a legislator restored. In the conflict with the Danes who held his country in bondage, he sustained and triumphed over the utmost severity of fortune; and when seated peaceably on the throne, he displayed, with the talents of a monarch, all the virtues of a man and a citizen. A still more glorious victory was that, which he achieved over the blindness and brutality of a barbarous age. And to crown his good fortune, he enjoyed in a protracted life and continued health, the opportunity of laboring for the completion of his wise and benevolent designs. Here we find a character that might seem at first view, to approach near to that of Washington. It comes, indeed



much nearer than any other on record. But a closer inspection will shew how far it falls short.

Alfred, like Gustavus Vasa the Swedish hero, in a later age, fought for himself and not for his country. Like Vasa he struggled to regain a throne from which he had been expelled, and risked nothing in the contest but a life, which, in exile obscurity and indigence, was not worth preserving. Even this life they hardly could be said to risk; for it was pursued with unceasing vigilance and activity by the usurpers, and was probably more safe in resistance than in concealment or flight.

But Washington fought for his country alone. He had no personal interest in the contest; and had he not been impelled to the field by his patriotic ardor, he might safely have enjoyed at home, in the midst of opulence respect and pleasing occupations, that retirement which he so much loved.

Alfred, moreover, was the legitimate monarch of his country, to whose authority all who joined his standard or adhered to his cause implicitly submitted. He was therefore master of his own measures and means. He had to encounter none of those innumerable and perpetually recurring obstacles, which must be surmounted by one who acts in such affairs by a delegated authority, depending on a distant and numerous body; whose apprehensions and alarms often counteract, or their indecision and delay, wholly defeat, the best concerted and most important plans.

Alfred's nation was inured to war and hardship, by its situation and the state of its manners. It smarted under a present and galling bondage, which inflicted evils far more dreadful to it than those of war. The nation of Washington, on the contrary, was a nation of peaceful agriculturalists, wholly unused to war its hardships or privations, and possessing almost universally the comforts of ease plenty and personal independence. The evils which they took up arms to resist, were in a great degree speculative and remote. They were discried by reason in their distant approach, but had not come near enough to be felt, except by a few. But the evils and privations of resistance were immediate palpable and painful. It is easy to see how much more difficult it was kept alive the spirit of resistance, and to maintain the conflict, in one case than in the other.



On these accounts we must place even Alfred below Washington ; and still more Gustavus Vasa, whose character and actions, though inferior to those of Alfred, very much resemble them.

Nearly in the same age with Alfred lived a man, into whose name the appellation of Great has been incorporated : Charles the Great, or Charlemaine, as he is always called in history. We might therefore expect to find in him a fit competitor with Washington. But if we inspect his character and actions, we shall find little to distinguish him from the herd of conquerors, whose crimes have stained the earth. Superior perhaps to Tamerlane Gengiskhan and Attila, though greatly inferior to Cyrus or even to Alexander, he was engaged throughout a long life in unjust and sanguinary wars, for the subjugation of countries which he could not govern, and the formation of an empire which he could not consolidate. He possessed indeed ideas of legislation above the age in which he lived ; and might have been a great monarch, had his mind been imbued with the love of justice, and his heart open to the feelings of humanity. But let us dismiss him by repeating the maxim, that successful crime must not aspire to the palm of greatness.

Nearer to our own times lived a man, whose objects actions and character eminently entitle him to the name of Great ; and with whom this parallel must be concluded. Peter of Russia may claim, on various grounds, a lofty preeminence over all who have lived before him, or whom Europe has since produced. The idea, conceived by an untaught youth, of civilizing a barbarous nation, and of beginning the work by civilizing himself : the courage vigor and address with which the first and most formidable obstacles were encountered and subdued : the profound views of legislation and government, which his untutored mind conceived at an early age : the resolution to quit, in the full glow of the passions, all the delights of absolute power, all the gratifications which it affords to every youthful desire ; and to travel in the character of a laborer into foreign countries, for the purpose of learning useful arts, which he might afterwards teach to his subjects : the determination in a young emperor, to serve as a common soldier in his own army, and to rise slowly through all its different grades, in order to qualify himself for command,



and to give his subjects an example of obedience and subordination: his skill in war; the vigor and constancy with which he bore up, under a long course of defeat and disaster; the new resources which his genius continually found or created; and his ultimate triumph, with a raw militia, over the best troops and greatest commander of the age: the wisdom unshaken constancy and unwearied perseverance with which he pursued his plan, through his whole life; the magnanimity with which he sacrificed his ease his pleasures and even the affections and feelings of his heart to its accomplishment, for the good of his people: all mark a character of the most transcendent greatness, and compel us to acknowledge that it is only in the milder and more amiable virtues, that Washington can claim the superiority over Peter. It is by the union of those virtues with all the great qualities of the mind and the heart, what Peter possessed; by the complete empire which he established and always maintained over his own passions; by a character to which detraction has not imputed a vice, and a life in which envy has not discovered a blot; that he rises above this his last and greatest competitor, and fixes himself immovably on the highest column in the temple of fame.

In this temple, dedicated by the human race to the great and good, he shall find a suitable place; though the little minded malignity of party spirit denies to his ashes, the tomb decreed by his mourning country. Although in this land which he saved, no monument be raised to his name, by the government which through him was established; although no public honors be decreed to his memory, by those to whose freedom and happiness he devoted his life; yet his fellow citizens have entombed him in their hearts, and the veneration of mankind has given him a monument, loftier than the pyramids and more solid than the granite of his native river.\* And the day shall soon arrive, when the base passions which rose like a pestilent vapor, to cloud his setting ray, shall be dispersed, and the government of his country shall vie with the nation, in works and institutions for doing honor to his memory.

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\* — *Monumentum ære perennius,  
Regalique situ pyramidum altior.*

HOR.



But, Americans, it is of little avail, that we yield to a generous indignation, at the neglect with which he is treated by the government of his country, or indulge the proud sentiment which results from a comparison of his character with the most illustrious in history; unless we endeavor to draw from his life some practical lessons for our own conduct. His mission to this world was not confined to the benefit, which while living he might bestow on his country. It was part of his sublime vocation to live for us beyond the grave; and to leave us in his example a guide for our conduct, through all future ages. "Though dead he yet speaketh." Harken then to his voice. In the awful circumstances in which we are placed, take counsel from his wisdom. Let his spirit still guide us to safety.

A monster the most fierce sanguinary and relentless that has hitherto ravaged the earth, with his fangs fixed in the almost lifeless carcase of continental Europe, now casts his eye, with a baleful and malignant scowl, on our happy country, destined by him, tho' vainly I trust, as his future prey. Two powers alone resist; one with generous devotion and heroic constancy, but unequal means; the other with strength unimpaired and courage undismayed. Against her, as the only obstacle to his designs, all his efforts of fraud and force are directed. In the mighty struggle for her own preservation; she wards off the danger from our house; but sometimes in the heat of the conflict, she treads inadvertently on our grass, or finds it necessary to throw down a fence, on a distant part of our farm. The fierce assailant whom she struggles to repel, haughtily and peremptorily calls on us to resent these trespasses, as inexpiable injuries. He cries out that to avenge them we must aid him in destroying her. He tells us that to assert our honor, and secure our own safety, we must assist in pulling down the last barrier between ourselves and him. This demand he enforces by insults and menaces, each surpassing the other in aggravation; and by striking us whenever and wherever he can reach us. Shall we obey his call? Shall we blindly or basely submit, to be cajolled or whipt into this act of self destruction? Shall we light the torch which must consume our own dwelling, in order to further the views of a desperate incendiary, who wishes to burn the house of our neighbor? Ask the spirit of Washington. Ask how he would have acted, in a



situation so new and so awful. Look to the maxims of his policy and to his conduct for an answer.

Discarding all passion prejudice and sinister motives from his mind ; raising himself above the influence of resentment and of fear ; he would calmly scan the character of the contest, and the nature and extent of the danger to be apprehended, from each contending party. He would quickly perceive that on one side it was a struggle for universal dominion, and for independence and existence on the other. He would see that in the attack every principle of justice, and every feeling of humanity, were scornfully set at nought ; the rights of nations and of individuals trampled under foot ; and their prosperity and happiness sacrificed, without hesitation or remorse. In the defence against such an attack he would not be surprised to find, that what was strictly due to others was sometimes overlooked ; that weapons, the use of which in ordinary times could not be justified, were sometimes employed ; that the blows levelled at the assailant, should sometimes through proximity of situation, and sometimes through want of sufficient caution, rebound on those who stood behind the party assailed ; or that leisure or even inclination should not always be found, in the pressure of so momentous a crisis, to attend sufficiently to complaints, or make atonement for acknowledged though comparatively considerable injuries.

In estimating the dangers to be apprehended from either contending party, he would perceive that the aggressor being held in check by his antagonist, and having no arms long enough to reach us, could do us little hurt during the continuance of the struggle ; but in case of success might instantly overwhelm us. Because success would unite the long arms of his antagonist to his own force, already irresistible wherever it can reach. Washington would also observe, that the power which this success would place at our door, has been uniformly employed in crushing all whom it could circumvent by fraud, or master by force ; that its instruments have in every instance become its victims ; and that while some respect, and even something like forbearance, has sometimes been shown by it, to such as bravely and firmly resist, the bitterest dregs in its cup of contempt rapacity and oppression, have always been reserved for those, who seek by meanness and submission to propitiate its wrath, or soften its fury.



On the other hand he would perceive, that the defending party, being placed in contact with us by the nature of its force, could do us great mischief during the struggle ; but could never, in case of success, acquire that species of force, which alone could render it formidable to our independence, our internal safety, or even our ultimate and permanent prosperity. He would discover that maritime power, however preeminent, may be mischievous on the sea, but cannot, unless united with great military power, be dangerous on the land; that it may molest restrict or destroy maritime commerce, but cannot endanger national independence ; that the military force of Britain, even if exerted against us, is not sufficient to make a lasting impression on our country ; and that situated as she is, by the side of a most formidable foe, infinitely superior in military means, and even threatening her with maritime competition, she never can think of employing in an attack on us, the forces which must forever be indispensable for her own defence.

In fine he would perceive, that the views of Britain are and ever must be confined, to commerce and maritime power, as the means of defence and independence ; and never can extend to foreign conquests, for which she is no more fitted than a shark is for ranging the forest.

Hence he would clearly perceive that we have much injury to fear from the hostility and resentment of England, during the contest ; but no permanent or important danger, from her ultimate success.

Reversing the picture he would see, that should Britain sink in the struggle, the maritime superiority which she now holds, and which in her hands is check and balanced, by the maritime faculties of the rest of Europe, by the formidable military strength of her neighbor and rival, and by her own paucity of military means, must pass into the hands of her enemy. It would be there united with the most formidable military power that the modern world has seen ; which, by this union, would be thenceforth rendered irresistible and omnipotent. The tyger indued with the faculties of the shark, would no longer find the ocean an obstruction to his ravages. To such a power no country would be distant, no retreat inaccessible. The hands of the French emperor, like those of Tiberius and Caligula, would reach to the utmost extremities of the earth. National independence, the life spring of human dignity energy and virtue, being crushed under the weight of univer-



sal despotism, the human mind would become inert torpid and corrupt ; and mankind would sink again into a state of darkness and barbarism from which nothing could rouse them, but the long convulsions produced by some new eruption, of fierce but uncorrupted barbarians.

Such, and not the "freedom of the seas," that shallow and hypocritical pretence, set up by knaves as a trap for the weak, and a cloak for themselves, would be the ultimate effect, to us and to the civilized world, of the triumph of France, in her present contest with Britain.

To us the immediate effect would be, not some interference with our commercial rights or speculations ; not the exclusion of our ships from some countries of Europe ; but a total destruction of our rights and freedom on the ocean ; the application of our entire means and resources to the remaining purposes of the despot ; the entire direction of our affairs, at first perhaps under the name of advice, but very soon in the undisguised shape of command ; and should we presume to resist or refuse, then an attack on us here at home, with a combination of external and alas ! of internal means, which though we might successfully withstand, would expose us to a long painful and bloody struggle, calculated to inflict unspeakable misery on the generations sustaining it, and to throw our country a century back, in the career of prosperity and improvement.

These effects, certain as death and permanent as time, the profound wisdom of Washington would perceive and would duly estimate. On that estimate he would found the system of measures which his country ought to pursue. He would say to Britain "our danger is common, though you are first exposed. Your house is first assailed by the torrent, but should it sweep you away, we must next receive its shock. Our situation, and the nature of our institutions, which confine our power of exertion to defensive operations, within our own country, render us unable to give you any direct assistance ; but you shall have our countenance, our cordial good wishes, and such indirect aid as a free and friendly intercourse can afford : nor shall any menaces or artful suggestions of your and our foe, induce us to omit these duties to ourselves and to you ; much less to prepare the way for own destruction, by aiding him in yours. Some of the measures indeed which you adopt in your defence, are very inconvenient to us. Some of them militate against what we deem our incontestible rights.



In the use of those means which we admit to be lawful, much abuse sometimes takes place. To nothing of this in common times would we submit. But these interests, when compared with the stupendous magnitude of the stake which we have in the contest, sink into insignificance. Their discussion shall therefore be postponed to happier times. We trust that when the danger is past you will readily adjust them ; and if, contrary to our expectation, you should then refuse, we shall be able to adopt suitable measures for doing justice to ourselves, without hazarding objects infinitely more important."

Such, in the present awful state of the world, would be the language of Washington to Britain. To Spain her noble fellow combatant he would then turn, and cordially stretching out the hand of friendship would say, " You are also fighting in the cause of humanity and national independence. The cause is ours as well as yours. We admire your heroism, sympathise in your sufferings, and look with anxious solicitude on the vicissitudes of your fortune. We are too far removed to give you direct assistance ; which indeed, in any extent within the reach of our means, could not perhaps be useful to you. But you possess our warmest wishes ; and so far as friendly intercourse countenance and encouragement can aid your glorious struggle, on that aid you may rely."

Thus would Washington speak, and thus would he act : for it was a part of his great and elevated character, never to deal in professions or unmeaning declamation, but to give a practical effect to the feelings of his heart, and the dictates of his judgment. Let us then, Americans, with this highest of human authorities to support us, turn to those in whose hands the direction of our affairs has been placed, and pointing to " the great example which ought to be ever before them," to the conduct of him who was " first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," say unto them, " Go ye and do likewise."

Here the subject appointed for the usual exercises of this day would permit us to stop. But we have still a mournful and tender duty to perform, which belongs more immediately to this society. Since we last assembled our much loved President, dear to his family his friends to us and his country, has departed from us forever. It would illy befit us, who were associated with him in this



noble institution, and many of whom were the companions of his latter years, to permit this first occasion of mutual condolence which has occurred since his loss, to pass without some public testimony of our affection and respect.

Let us then be permitted to descend from the sublime elevation, to which we were raised in the contemplation of Washington, and drop a parting tear on the grave of one, who in all the private and domestic virtues, in all that adorns and sweetens life, was fit to be, as he was, the friend and companion of that father of his country. After gazing with aching sight on the splendid orb of Washington's greatness, we turn with pleasure to the soft and mild lustre of private worth, which, like the moon in a summer evening, enlightens without scorching, and spreads a sweet serenity over the mind of the beholder.

To you who intimately knew him I need not recount, how just he was in his dealings, how humane in his conduct, how beneficent in his disposition; how kind was his deportment, how polished his manners, how candid and liberal his mind, and how unbounded his hospitality. To his friends and neighbors I need not say, that he was the truest friend and the kindest neighbor. To his mourning family and relatives I need not relate, that he was the tenderest husband the fondest father and the most indulgent master. The poor who partook of his charity need not be reminded; how full and how constant was its stream. Nor need the people of Virginia be told, with what steady devotion, in the most trying times, he adhered to the cause of his country. But this society is known beyond the limits of private reputation; and when it boasts of Washington as its founder and patron, it ought to indulge an honest pride in proclaiming to the world, "*such was FITZ-HUGH of Chatham once our President.*"

FINIS.



